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INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5802
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 1981
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY 4246
RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY 0946
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 1884
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY 6896
RHMFISS/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 000661

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2027
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KS](#) [CH](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: JAPAN CONCERNED ABOUT PASSAGE OF "COMFORT WOMEN"
RESOLUTION

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons:
1.4 (b)(d).

¶1. (C) The Abe government is moving ahead on several fronts to counter the proposed sense of Congress resolution condemning Japan for its treatment of World War II "comfort women." MOFA Asian Bureau Regional Policy Division Director Aikawa told us February 13, he had been asked to relay that the Prime Minister's Office was "seriously concerned" about the pending House resolution and said its passage could "adversely affect" bilateral relations. Political Minister Counselor Meserve immediately explained to Aikawa, North American Affairs DDG Umemoto and Foreign Policy Division Director Kanehara steps the Department had taken to explain the political and historical context of the issue to relevant Congressional parties. Umemoto stressed that Abe was under heavy pressure on this issue from a small group of Diet members. End summary.

¶2. (C) MOFA Asian Bureau Regional Policy Division Director Kazutoshi Aikawa contacted Embassy February 13, 2007 to relay Japan's strong concerns about the proposed sense of Congress resolution sponsored by Rep. Honda. The nonbinding resolution, which condemns Japan's treatment of World War II "comfort women", if passed, could "adversely affect" bilateral relations, he asserted. Aikawa described the language of the proposed resolution as "harsh" and "inflammatory," using such terms as "sex slave" and "unprecedented human trafficking." Moreover, he noted, the resolution does not reflect the many explicit statements of apology made by Japan's prime ministers, which PM Abe had reaffirmed in October 2006, shortly after taking office. Japan is also concerned about the hearing scheduled by Rep. Honda for February 15. The list of witnesses, he said, was not balanced, since it is weighted heavily to NGO's representing the comfort women.

¶3. (C) An influential group of conservative LDP Diet members, currently headed by Yasuhide Nakayama and including LDP Policy Affairs Research Committee Chair Shoichi Nakagawa and MEXT Vice Cabinet Secretary Hakubun Shimomura, are all deeply concerned, Aikawa said. Prime Minister Abe has also been a member of this group, he pointed out, and is also "very concerned" about the resolution. Aikawa recounted a highly charged meeting of the group at which he was asked to explain what MOFA was doing to head off the resolution. He had explained that the resolution was nonbinding, but said that the distinction made little difference to the Diet members.

Passage prior to PM Abe's May visit to Washington would be seen as a "slap in the face," he asserted. Aikawa formally asked Political Officer to relay Japan's concerns to Washington.

¶4. (C) Embassy Tokyo Political Minister Counselor Meserve later spoke with Division Director Aikawa and, subsequently together with the DCM, with North American Affairs Deputy Director General Kazuyoshi Umemoto and Policy Coordination Division Director Nobukatsu Kanehara. Donovan and Meserve shared draft press guidance (posted to the Department's website on February 14) on the comfort women issue, calling attention to the quotation from PM Koizumi's 2001 letter of apology to comfort women. Umemoto, who hadn't seen the guidance, said it was excellent and would help prevent the issue from becoming more contentious.

¶5. (C) Umemoto reiterated that MOFA is under considerable pressure from the Prime Minister's Office to address the matter. Abe, he noted, had come under attack from some Diet members who objected to his October 2006 reaffirmation of earlier apologies. Taking this stand, combined with his decision not to visit Yasukuni for the time being, has made him more vulnerable to conservative criticism, Umemoto noted.

Both Aikawa and Umemoto said MOFA officers had been called to the Diet by some conservative members for harsh criticism sessions. Allowing these Diet members did not represent the majority or accurately reflect the thinking of Japan's people, Umemoto, Aikawa and Kanehara warned they were very emotional and would react badly to passage of the resolution by the U.S. Congress.

¶6. (C) Following up on media reports, Embassy confirmed February 14 that the LDP on February 9 granted approval to Yasuhide Nakayama's Subcommittee on the Comfort Women Issue to travel to Washington to lobby against the resolution. Nakayama's staff reported that, as of February 14, no decision had been made on the timing or composition of the group. Separately, the media reported February 15 that the Prime Minister is dispatching his media advisor Hiroshige Seko to Washington on February 19 to meet with major media and think tanks to discuss the issue. In the meantime, Japan's Ambassador to the U.S. Ryozi Kato, stressed in a February 13 press conference with Japanese reporters that elements of the Honda draft resolution were "not based on objective facts."

¶7. (C) Comment: MOFA's demarche using exceptionally strong language, combined with the LDP's approval to send a group to Washington to lobby against the resolution, and Abe's dispatch of media advisor Seko on February 19 for the same purpose reflect the pressure that Abe feels from his right flank and his need to appear to be taking action.

SCHIEFFER